



# Aethiopica 16 (2013)

International Journal of Ethiopian and  
Eritrean Studies

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## Article

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in Eritrea?*

Aethiopica 16 (2013), 102–129

ISSN: 2194–4024

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Edited in the Asien-Afrika-Institut  
Hiob Ludolf Zentrum für Äthiopistik  
der Universität Hamburg  
Abteilung für Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

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## Who should take the Credit for the Bible Translation Works carried out in Eritrea?

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### The success with scriptural works in Eritrea in general

Well documented are the remarkable literary and scriptural achievements carried out by the Swedish Evangelical Mission (SEM) in Eritrea<sup>1</sup> through the foreign and native workers it engaged for more than a century, i.e., from the early 1880s until the late 1980s). Enno Littmann (1875–1956)<sup>2</sup> testifies to this feat as:

From the merely scholarly standpoint the work of the missionaries in studying these languages (i.e., Tigriña, Tigrë, Kunama, Galla and Suaheli) and creating written literatures where formerly there were none, is of the greatest value and importance.<sup>3</sup>

and Edward Ullendorff as:

No praise can be too high for the scholarly work accomplished by the Swedish missionaries in Eritrea.<sup>4</sup>

Most notable of these achievements is the assignment of translating the Bible into native languages as part of the vision of the SEM.<sup>5</sup> Many hurdles, internal

<sup>1</sup> In their interesting work *Notizie storiche e varie sulla Missione Evangelica Svedese dell'Eritrea (1866–1916)*, for instance, J. Iwarson and A. Tron provide a list of 66 scriptural and other literary works published in Təgrəñña, Təgre, Amharic, Gəʿəz, Galla (Oromo), Kunama and Kiswahili by the SEM in a span of 51 years (1866–1917). These productions were the individual or group efforts of (original texts or translations by) such foreign workers as Dr. Karl Winqvist, Agnes and Karl Nyström, Norlèle W. Lundgren, Olof Eriksson, P. Ahlberg, Jonas Iwarson, Alessandro Tron, K.G. Rodén, M. Lutero, Dr. G.R. Sundström, Otto von Gerlach, J. Mayer, Renlund, August Andersson and P. Olsson as well as native workers such as Sälomon ʿAşqu, Zärʾä-Şəyon Muse, Marəqos Gərəmay, Dawit Amanuʾel who was not listed but can be inferred from the list, Təwäldä-Mädəhn Gäbrä-Mädəhn (1860–1930), Gäbrä-Səllase aka *abba* Mäʾašo, *aläqä* Tayäləñ and Onesimos Näsib; cp. IWARSON – TRON 1918: 36–39.

<sup>2</sup> The birth and death dates of most of the foreign workers as well as their brief biographies have been gathered from LUNDSTRÖM – EZRA GEBREMEDHIN 2011; ARÉN 1978; PUGLISI 1952 or *EAE* I–IV.

<sup>3</sup> LUNDSTRÖM – EZRA GEBREMEDHIN 2011: 94.

<sup>4</sup> ULLENDORFF 1960: 20.

<sup>5</sup> The SEM believed from the beginning that “reading the Bible [in one’s mother tongue] was the most important vehicle for the spread and consolidation of the Gospel”; LUNDSTRÖM – EZRA GEBREMEDHIN 2011: 128.

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and external to the workers, encountered the Bible translation vision as the years progressed. The workers manifested incredible linguistic and literary skills including a fantastic record of coining expressions, phraseologies and words. Their ages and backgrounds varied as did their characters.

As I contemplated the similarities among the Bible translation stories in Eritrea, however, I observed an unfitting, and in some cases dishonest trait of a similar character in the foreign workers: *taking overstated credit for most or all of the translation works even if indigenous colleagues undertook most or all of the translation work*. Initially, I thought that this trait was a coincidence in the Oromo and Təgre translation stories which I studied first; however, as I dug deeper into the translation stories from this perspective, I found out that the trend of taking beyond-deserved credits by the foreign missionaries repeated itself in the other works too, hence this article. I must underscore at the outset, however, that despite the above mentioned trait, there are documented, remarkable contributions of foreign missionaries to the development of scripture in native languages in Eritrea and Ethiopia. In the case of Ethiopia, my comment is limited to the Oromo works.

### On the Oromo Bible

#### Earlier Translations of Some Books of the Bible into Oromo

Although Onesimos' translation of the Bible into Oromo, as is widely known, has been recorded as the most advanced and comprehensive work, there were Oromo translations of some books of the Bible already in print beforehand. These were the documents Onesimos referred to in his Bible translation work.

Intended for the Oromo people living south of Lake Abbayya in Ethiopia and in Kenya, the United Methodist Free Church Missionary (UMFCM) had translated and printed the Book of Jonah in 1878 in its press in Ribe, Denmark. Again in 1889, a year before Onesimos' Oromo Bible was printed, Thomas Wakefield of the UMFCM translated the Gospel of John which was printed by the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS).<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, in 1886, the BFBS printed the Gospel of Mathew which was translated into the Ituu, one of the eastern Oromo dialects, by Haḡlu, a freed Oromo slave from the Harär province of Ethiopia.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps, the most notable translation work before Onesimos' Bible was the work orchestrated by the German missionary Rev. Johann Ludwig Krapf (1810–1881) and two Ethiopians, Rufo – a freed slave – and *däbtära* Zännäb, a

<sup>6</sup> MERDASSA KASSAYE 2003: 576.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

talented scribe (d. October 1876). Dr. Krapf of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), known for his missionary efforts to the Oromo People,<sup>8</sup> had, during his stay in the Šäwa province of Ethiopia between 1839 and 1842, initiated the work of preparing scriptural works in the Oromo language where he translated the Gospels of John which was a tentative translation printed in 1839 in London by the CMS and Matthew which was privately printed in 1841 by him in London<sup>9</sup> into Oromo and prepared a first grammar and vocabulary.<sup>10</sup> By 1843, Krapf prepared manuscripts of his translations of the books of Genesis, Matthew, Mark and Romans. Krapf's translations were prepared in Latin alphabets.<sup>11</sup>

In a succeeding event, in 1865, the missionary station of St. Paul's in the Sudan bought an Oromo slave, Rufo (1848/50–1871, later named Christian Paulus Ludwig Rufo), and sent him to Kornthal, Germany to assist Krapf in his continued Oromo Bible translation project. With Krapf assisting Rufo by reference to the Greek original, Rufo:

[...] started to work in the printing press of St. Chrischona Pilgrim Mission near Basel due to his knowledge of Amharic. After Krapf returned from a mission to the British-Indian invasion army in Ethiopia in 1868, he and Rufo continued with their translations and, as a result, the Gospel of St. Luke in Oromo was published in 1870. He also assisted Krapf in revising his twenty-year-old Oromo translations of the Gospel of St. Matthew and several chapters of St. John [...]

<sup>8</sup>For a brief history of the missionary works of Krapf in Ethiopia, see PROJECT CAN-  
TERBURY n.d.

<sup>9</sup>They appeared as *Tentamen imbecillum translationis Evangelii Johannis in linguam Gallarum* and *Evangelium Matthei, translatum in linguam Gallarum* respectively; MERDASSA KASSAYE 2003. Arén states that as to the Gospel of John the translation was done for Chapters 1–5 thereof and adds that Krapf translated the Book of Genesis during his stay in Šäwa between 1839 and 1842. Moreover, unlike his translations of Matthew and John which were printed in London while he was in Šäwa, his translation of Genesis existed only in manuscript form during his stay in Šäwa; see ARÉN 1978: 446.

<sup>10</sup>See PIROUET n.d.: 6–7 for Krapf's extraordinary linguistic range and his numerous engagements in scriptural works in different languages spoken in East Africa. Records show that he mastered Latin, Greek, French, Italian, Arabic, Oromo, Kiswahili, Kikamba, Amharic and others; see GRÄBER – SMIDT 2007: 436ff.

<sup>11</sup>MERDASSA KASSAYE 2003: 6; Krapf prepared his Ethiopia-related Scriptural works in the course of his four journeys to Ethiopia (1837, January 1839, the end of 1842 and 1855). On a fifth journey to Ethiopia, he was brought in with General Sir Robert Napier (1810–1890) as an interpreter when the latter arrived leading the famous Napier Expedition which culminated in the Good Friday battle of 10 April 1868 at Mäqdäla. Aše Tewodros committed suicide by shooting himself in the head; see GRÄBER – SMIDT 2007: 437; MÜLLER – PANKHURST 2007: 1137b–1139b.

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Using Rufo's translations and a manuscript of the Ethiopian priest Zenneb,<sup>12</sup> who had started his work after Rufo in 1868, Krapf prepared a manuscript of the whole New Testament in Oromo, which was finally published in 1876. As this book is a mixture of different manuscripts – Krapf's, Rufo's and Zenneb's – the language is heterogeneous, praised by some and criticized by others. Among the critics was the next Oromo Bible translator one generation later, Onesimos, a former slave who worked for the Swedish mission. He based his Bible translation on the work of Krapf, Rufo and Zenneb. Already in 1870 the first Oromo Bible portions had reached the Oromo of Shoa, the whole New Testament followed around 1877. Whether the Oromo portions of the Old Testament arrived in the region is unknown.<sup>13</sup>

Another account of the Rufo-Zännäb-Krapf work goes as follows:

In September 1868 *aläqa* Zännäb, who had known Krapf since 1855 and was close to the protestant missionaries [the Pilgrim missionaries and the Swiss missionary Johannes Maier], started to send Krapf his own translations, based on the Šäwa dialect. He used them to improve the translation made by Ruufoo, his Oromo assistant,<sup>14</sup> and provided the amalgamated texts for printing to the St. Chrischona Mission. Subsequently, Luke (1870), John (1871), Genesis and Psalms (1872), the Acts of the Apostles (1874), the Epistles of Paul, Mathew and Mark (1875), the New Testament (1876) and Exodus (1877) were all printed in St. Chrischona.<sup>15</sup>

### Krapf takes the credit

There has been a controversy as to whether Krapf is the real translator of, hence rightfully deserving the full credit for, the Oromo books that were published at the Pilgrim Mission Press of St. Chrischona between 1870 and 1877, i.e., the entire New Testament, Genesis, Exodus and the Psalms. In

<sup>12</sup> *Däbtära* (or *aläqa*) Zännäb (d. 1871) was Emperor Tewodros' scribe and chronicler and after his conversion into the protestant faith in 1859 became the first indigenous evangelist for the Pilgrim missionaries who were working in Gafat, a village near Däbrä Tabor in north-central Ethiopia. He was instrumental to the missionaries' evangelical efforts to the Oromo people; see ARÉN 1978: 93f., 154–157.

<sup>13</sup> SMIDT n.d.; KNAUB 1992, cols. 606ff.

<sup>14</sup> If Rufo was in Ethiopia at this time and was an assistant to *däbtära* Zännäb, then Arén's statement that there was a second assistant to Zännäb must be quoted here: "[Around the spring of 1870, *aläqa* Zännäb] was now working at a translation of the New Testament into Oromo assisted by two young men from Nonno (an Oromo kingdom south-west of Šäwa)"; see ARÉN 1978: 154, 448.

<sup>15</sup> MERDASSA KASSAYE 2003.

other words, has history appropriately apportioned the credit for the assignment that was carried out by Krapf, *aläqa* Zännäb and Rufo?

On a personal level Krapf, in the case of the 1876 Oromo New Testament, in what seems an insincere manner, inserted a different English text into the title of the New Testament from the one in the Oromo version. In the English version of the title, which would definitely be read by a wider international audience, he inserted the caption “The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Translated into the Galla Language by the Rev. Dr. Krapf” whereas in the Oromo version of the title for the New Testament he included the names of *aläqa* (*däbtära*) Zännäb, Rufo, Šolan (Scholan), Ware and Ğägän (Dchagan) as his ‘assistants’.<sup>16</sup>

Owing to the confusion on the real authorship of the translation of the 1876 Oromo New Testament created by this caption, as well as other claims by Krapf, Gustav Arén, one of, if not, the most authoritative scholars on the history of the evangelical movement in Eritrea and the Oromo of Ethiopia, examined Krapf’s claim of translating books of the Bible and made a curious analysis, titled “Dr. J.L. Krapf and His Oromo Scriptures”.

Between the years 1870 and 1877 the British and Foreign Bible Society published the entire New Testament, Genesis, Exodus and Psalms in Oromo (or ‘Galla’) at the Pilgrim Mission Press of St Chrischona. On the title page of each installment it was stated that the translation has been made by the Revd Dr J.L. Krapf ‘with the assistance of Deberta Saneb, a native of Efat, and Roofo, a young Galla of the Gooma tribe’.

It was presumably taken for granted that Krapf was the translator, the more so as the first Scripture portion, that of St. Luke’s Gospel, which was published in 1870, stated that the translation was based upon the Greek text. In light of our sources, *it must now be doubted whether the 1870–1877 edition of the Oromo Scriptures had been ‘translated’ by Krapf*. The version probably emanated from *Aleqa* (or *Däbtära*) Zenneb, the emperor Teodros’s secretary and chronicler, whereas Krapf had only perused his manuscripts and carried them through the press.

During his stay in Shoa from June 1839 to March 1842 Krapf had learnt the Oromo language and had translated the Gospel of St Matthew, chapters 1–5 of St John and the Book of Genesis. The first two scriptures had been published in London before he left Shoa. Genesis existed only in manuscript. From Ethiopia Krapf proceeded south and initiated the East Africa Mission of the Church Missionary Society. The Ethiopian field was abandoned and the new enterprise required the study of new languages. The Oromo Genesis was not forwarded to the printer.

<sup>16</sup> See picture of the caption of the 1876 Oromo New Testament in MERDASSA KASSAYE 2003.

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It remained unpublished also after Krapf had visited the Emperor Teodros in April 1855 to explore the possibilities for sending Pilgrim missionaries to Ethiopia. Yet they hoped ultimately to proceed into Oromo country. On publishing his *Travels and Missionary Labours in East Africa* in 1860 Krapf included a list of 'The present Literature of Abessinia'. In this list he stated that his translation of Genesis existed only in manuscript form.

Krapf did evidently not do anything to produce any Oromo Scriptures until September 1868, when Zenneb sent him his own version of the Four Gospels in Oromo for publication. This appears from reports and letters to the Bible Society in London from its agents in Ethiopia and their assistants in Europe. Their correspondence does not seem to have been utilized previously for the study of Ethiopian history.

It may be taken for granted that Krapf had seen Zenneb, the royal chronicler, at the camp of Teodros in April 1855. After that it is improbable that they ever met again. Though Krapf had been recruited by Sir Robert Napier for service as interpreter to his expedition to Meqdela, for medical reasons he had been granted a release from his engagement in February 1868 and had returned to Europe some two months before Zenneb left Meqdela in April 1868 to accompany Mr Martin Flad to Egypt. It was from there that Zenneb sent his manuscript of the Four Gospels to Krapf.

Since he was not allowed to proceed to Europe, as he apparently had hoped, he [i.e., Zännäb] returned to Massawa, where he stayed with Mr Werner Münzinger, the French consular agent, until Messrs Johannes Maier and Christian Bender returned from Jerusalem to Ethiopia as agents of the Bible Society and offered him employment. During his sojourn at Massawa, Zenneb worked at his translations of the Scriptures 'for his private use' in preparation for an evangelistic enterprise among the Oromo of his native Shoa. He then continued his translation at Adwa, assisted by two young Oromo from Nonno named Gebre-Michael (Rufo?) and Waré.

In June 1870 Krapf could report that he had received Zenneb's manuscript of the entire New Testament and was perusing it before sending it to Chrischona to be printed. After Zenneb's death in October 1876 in Shoa, the translation of the Oromo Bible was discontinued. Was Krapf not qualified to carry on? Evidently not. He had stayed less than three years in Shoa, and more than thirty-four years had passed since then. Besides, in the early 1870's Krapf had been busy revising and editing Abu Rumi's version of the Old Testament in Amarinya by improving its text after the Hebrew original. Is it



conceivable that Krapf was capable of translating the Bible into Oromo at the same time as he was revising the Bible in Amarinya, and that without any Oromo to consult?

*These considerations lead us to conclude that it was Zenneb, and not Krapf, who translated the 1870–1877 edition of the Oromo scriptures.* [emphasis added].<sup>17</sup>

Recent publications have, however, shown, by reference to Krapf's letters on his work on the Oromo Bible translation and documents in missionary archives on Rufo that contrary to Arén's conclusion above most of the Oromo translation was carried out by Rufo, under Krapf's guidance, not by *aläqa* Zännäb.<sup>18</sup> The publications hold that although Krapf admitted to having received Zännäb's translations sent to him by the latter from Adwa he used them to correct the Rufo–Krapf manuscript which was already completed during the arrival of Zännäb's documents.<sup>19</sup> Even if we were to recognize Rufo's endeavour over Arén's crediting of Zännäb with translation of the Oromo manuscripts, the fact of Krapf's exaggerated claim of translating the Oromo New Testament remains unchanged.

#### **An indigenous worker too has traces of the trait**

Undoubtedly, Onesimos Näsib is the champion of producing the entire Oromo Bible, the *Maçaafa Qulqulluu*, which was printed in Gəʿəz script on 10 June 1899 at St. Chrischona, Switzerland.<sup>20</sup> Although in the production of the Oromo bible Onesimos had made use of previous publications – most notably Krapf's productions<sup>21</sup> – the narration of the production of his Bible may be divided into two parts: the printing of the New Testament (the *Kaku Haaraa*, 1893) which was basically a rework of the earlier Krapf–Rufo–Zännäb version; and the printing of the whole Bible (1899).

Although Onesimos' name is justifiably linked with the production of Oromo literary and scriptural works, Onesimos himself was not open enough in highlighting the contributions of his colleagues who worked with him, especially that of Aster Gannoo Salbaan (1874<sup>22</sup>–1964). Born free, but later enslaved by the king of Limmu-Ennarea, Aster was one of a few young girls liberated in 1886 by Italian ships which intercepted a boat that was

<sup>17</sup> ARÉN 1978: 446ff.

<sup>18</sup> SMIDT n.d.

<sup>19</sup> E-mail communication with Wolbert G.C. Smidt (28 April 2012).

<sup>20</sup> MERDASSA KASSAYE 2003; ARÉN 1978: 385.

<sup>21</sup> KEBEDE HORDOFA JANKO 2010: 28b.

<sup>22</sup> According to Lundström and Ezra Gebremedhin, her year of birth was 1859; see LUNDSTRÖM – EZRA GEBREMEDHIN 2011: 165.



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taking them to be sold as slaves on the Arabian Peninsula. They were then brought to the missionaries stationed at Æmkullu. Onesimos, Aster and the others produced a number of Oromo books.<sup>23</sup> Among the liberated girls, Aster proved to be the most gifted in all aspects of the Oromo language. Her exceptional mental gifts and her ability to find correct idiomatic words and expressions enabled Onesimos, who left his native land at a very young age, to successfully produce the Bible in the Oromo language. She shines in the records as a woman who was exceptionally gifted in her sense of the Oromo language and in her assisting Onesimos. She does not, however, appear as a co-translator at least in the *Kaku Haaraa* the caption of which reads *The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ translated into Galla by Onesimos Nesib at Moncullo*. Arén summarizes the contribution of the two workers on the production of the *Kaku Haaraa* as:

It rightfully bore the name of Onesimos Nesib, but it is evident that much credit for the final structure of the language ought to go to his young female assistant.<sup>24</sup>

As for the Old Testament, the story may be different and we may rightfully give full credit to Onesimos. He had started the translation in 1880 and after 17 years of labour he completed the work in June 1897. For the next two years (1897–1899), he revised his work by reference to Amharic, Swedish and Oromo scriptures. Finally, personally supervised by Onesimos, the *Maçaafa Qulqulluu* was printed in Gəʿəz script on 10 June 1899 at

<sup>23</sup> These include: the translation by Onesimos of seven books, two of which were done with Aster; an Oromo-Swedish dictionary of some 6,000 words which was compiled by Aster; *Katekismos*, an Oromo version of Luther's *Catechism*; *Garaan Namaa Mana Waaqayo Yookiis Iddo Bultii Seetana*, an Oromo translation of John Bunyan's *Man's Heart either God's Temple or Satan's Abode* printed in 1899; *Si'a Lama Oduu Shantami-Lama*, an 1899 translation by Aster of Birth's *Bible Stories* – other sources claim she co-authored it with Onesimos; Aster's (and Onesimos') *Galqaba Barsiisaa*, *The Galla Spelling Book and Reader* printed in 1894, a 174-page long collection of 3,600 words and 79 short stories, most of which were collected from Oromo oral literature; a vocabulary of about 15,000 words which Onesimos prepared with his colleagues with the aim of compiling a dictionary, facilitating the translation of the Scriptures and preparing educational literature; a compilation of 500 Oromo oral literature, love songs, riddles, fables, proverbs, parables, ballads, baby songs, Oromo prayers, warriors' songs, *ateetee* songs which were spiritual songs of women, shepherds' songs and stories written down by Aster from memory – other sources claim that these collections were the substance of the *Galqaba Barsiisaa*; and a comprehensive grammar of the Oromo language; see MEKURIA BULCHA 1995: 40–42; ARÉN 1978: 295f., 383f.; KEBEDE HORDOFA JANKO 2010: 29; KEBEDE HORDOFA JANKO – UNSETH 2003: 387b.

<sup>24</sup> ARÉN 1978: 384.

St. Chrischona, Switzerland.<sup>25</sup> Arén lauds Onesimos' work by translating the Bible into Oromo as follows:

The Oromo version of the Holy Scripture is a remarkable achievement; it was to all intents the fruit of the dedicated labour of one man, Onesimos Nesib [...].<sup>26</sup>

### On the Təgre Bible

Translation of the first version of the Təgre New Testament (c. 1878–1890)

The story of the translation of the Bible into Təgre may be divided into four stages spreading over a span of 111 years. The first stage spreads between some time before 1883 and 1902 when the Təgre translation of the New Testament was produced. The second stage follows the printing of the 1902 New Testament until 1931 when a second version of the Təgre New Testament was published. The third stage starts towards the end of the 1920s and continues until 1943 when the manuscript for the translation of the Old Testament into Təgre was produced. Following an interruption of 35 years from 1943, the final stage spans between 1978 and 1988 when the complete translation of the Bible into Təgre was produced. The first two stages of the translation history will be the focus of this section.

Sometime before 1883, the leader of the Æmkullu mission station, Rev. Bengt Peter Lundahl (1840–1885) had set *qäšši* (E)<sup>27</sup> Dawit Amanuʾel (1862–1944) to begin translating Holy Scriptures into the latter's native language Təgre.<sup>28</sup> Dawit,<sup>29</sup> called “the father of the Təgre language”,<sup>30</sup> began the work

<sup>25</sup> MERDASSA KASSAYE 2003; ARÉN 1978: 385.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 384; the *Mačaaſa Qulqulluu* appeared with the caption: “The Holy Bible containing the Old And New Testaments translated into the Galla Language by Onesimos Nesib, native of Galla”.

<sup>27</sup> The title *qäšši*, as probably known, is Təgrəñña for priest or pastor. The author has used the prefix along with the names of Eritrean evangelical workers and used the title “Rev.” for foreign workers. The identifier “(E)” has been used to distinguish native workers who had been ordained to priesthood or pastoral services by the Swedish or Eritrean Evangelical/Lutheran churches.

<sup>28</sup> ARÉN 1978: 303; in his preface to the 1902 New Testament, however, K.G. Rodén states that the translation of the New Testament into Təgre was initiated by Rev. E.E. Hedenström, the pioneer of the SEM mission at Gäläb, who, in 1880, set about Dawit Amanuʾel and Təwäldä Mädhən Gäbrä Mädhən, his students by then, to start translating the New Testament into Təgre.

<sup>29</sup> It is conventional in Eritrea to call a person by his first name. Dawit, born to a Muslim family, is the first convert of the Swedish Evangelical Mission from the Mänsaʿ group of the Təgre people. He was baptized in the Gäläb River on 8 July 1877 at the age of 15 by Lundahl (*ibid.*, p. 215).

<sup>30</sup> MUSA ʾARON 1988: 9.

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by translating the Gospel of Mark,<sup>31</sup> in assistance with *qäšši* (E) Tāwäldä Mädhən Gäbrä Mädhən (1860–1930) which was printed in 1889 at the printing press in Ḥmkullu.<sup>32</sup> 500 copies were printed at the time.<sup>33</sup> Dawit Amanuʾel was later joined by the native Təgrəñña speaker Tāwäldä Mädhən Gäbrä Mädhən and, by reference to the Bible versions in Gəʿəz, Amharic and Swedish, the two young colleagues continued translating the New Testament.<sup>34</sup>

When Tāwäldä-Mädhən left in 1883 to take theological training in Stockholm, his work with Dawit had progressed up to the middle of the Gospel of John.<sup>35</sup> After Tāwäldä Mädhən left, Dawit singularly continued the translation work alone until Tāwäldä Mädhən came back in 1887 to join him again. The two completed the translation of the New Testament in May 1890<sup>36</sup> *under the supervision* of Karl Winqvist (1847–1909) – records do not attest to his mastery of the Təgre language – and the first copies were printed in 1892. The fruits of the labour of Dawit and Tāwäldä Mädhən in the translation work motivated Winqvist to encourage Dawit to continue producing more Təgre works. Dawit, the man who can rightfully take the credit for pioneering Təgre literature, then produced a book of grammar and a dictionary containing 8,000 words. He also collected a great number of heroic ballads, dirges, epigrams, songs, stories, fables, proverbs<sup>37</sup> and laws of the Təgre tribe.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>31</sup> It appeared as *Evangelium enligt Markus, på Tigré-språket*. The author considers himself lucky to have seen Dawit's handwritten Gospel of Mark archived at the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Eritrea in August 2007.

<sup>32</sup> Voigt claims that the Gospel of Mark in Təgre was the product of Dawit Amanuʾel and Tāwäldä-Mädhən Gäbrä-Mädhən; VOIGT 2003: 577b. This is possible due to the fact that Tāwäldä-Mädhən Gäbrä-Mädhən “assisted” Dawit Amanuʾel in the latter's assignment to translate the Gospel of Mark into Təgre; see ARÉN 1978: 303; LUNDSTRÖM – EZRA GEBREMEDHIN 2011: 176, 226.

<sup>33</sup> ARÉN 1978: 356, n. 223.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 303; Winqvist said that Tāwäldä-Mädhən had a ‘keen ear and a fine feeling for language’.

<sup>35</sup> Tāwäldä Mädhən also prepared the first reader and spelling book in Təgre, *Kitab Fidäl Wäqran*, which was printed along with Dawit's Gospel of Mark in 1889; 300 copies were produced; *ibid.*, p. 356 (see also n. 222); LUNDSTRÖM – EZRA GEBREMEDHIN 2011: 226. Bereket attributes the authorship of this book, later improved and reprinted as *Kitab Agʾazot Wäqran* by *qäšši* (E) *māmhər* Musa Aron in 1957, both to Tāwäldä Mädhən and Dawit; see DESSALE BEREKET 2009.

<sup>36</sup> ARÉN 1978: 303, 356; Aron writes that the translation was completed in 1889 in Ḥmkullu; see MUSA ARON 1988.

<sup>37</sup> ARÉN 1978: 303; these collections were systematized by Karl Winqvist and given to Professor Enno Littmann who included them in his *Publications of the Princeton Expedition to Abyssinia; Tales, Customs, Names and Dirges of the Tigré Tribes, 1910–15*. Although we cannot be sure of who authored them, a *Bible Story* and a *Catechism* in Təgre were printed in 1895 as well; see ሄጠጠጠ ሀጠጠጠ-፪፪፪፪ 1966: 14.

### Revision of the Təgre New Testament (1890–1902)

The revision of the Dawit Amanuʾel–Täwäldä Mädhən Gäbrä Mädhən translation of the New Testament began even while its printing was underway. Hence, sometime after Dawit completed translating the New Testament in 1890, a committee of four people, that is Dawit Amanuʾel, Täwäldä Mädhən Gäbrä Mädhən, Karl Winqvist and Rev. K.G. Rodén, was established to review the translation. *Mämhər* (Teacher) Yəshaq Hemmed (according to Arén)/Yəshaq Həməd (according to Musa Aron) of Həbab (1866–?) – the first inpatient of the clinic at Əmkullu –<sup>39</sup> served as the committee’s secretary. The committee, predominantly led by Rodén,<sup>40</sup> reviewed the translation with a focus on the Greek original and with reference to Gəʿəz and English versions.

One of the most contentious issues during the revision process was on the choice between the first (*gəʿəz*) and fourth (*rabəʾə*) vowel orders of the Gəʿəz alphabet. Rodén stubbornly insisted on the use of the *gəʿəz* whereas others, particularly the local staff, preferred to use the *rabəʾə*.<sup>41</sup> Rodén, described as “a man of strict discipline and an indomitable will”, a man appearing “to have too strong a tendency to wish to dominate”,<sup>42</sup> and one who “was not prone to yield in matters of opinion” delayed the printing of the New Testament for two years, though revision was completed in 1900, and only sent it to printing when his views finally prevailed.<sup>43</sup> During a missionary conference held in Bäläza in October 1900, Rodén requested the conference to change the spelling rules proposed by the local staff. The conference, noting the disagreement between Rodén and the other group noted:

<sup>38</sup> ARÉN 1978, n. 119.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 325f.

<sup>40</sup> Aron confirms: “Nevertheless, it looks that Rodén was more involved in the revision”; MUSA ARON 1988: 10.

<sup>41</sup> In recording the reservations of the local staff regarding Rodén’s obduracy, Arén writes: “[...] the Ethiopian members of the revision committee questioned Rodén’s ‘discovery of the correct sentence structure’ and his ‘bold exchange of *rabe*, the fourth alphabet, for *geʿez*, the first vowel’. With Rodén not willing to accommodate their comments, Təwolde-Medhin expressed hope that most readers would nevertheless grasp the meaning of the text” (ARÉN 1978: 357).

“Nearly three decades after the printing of the 1902 Təgré Testament, the second edition of Təgré New Testament appeared in 1931, a work mainly spearheaded by Rodén. At this time, however, Rodén, possibly as a result also of the bitter debates he had with Sundström for many years on this very issue, seemed to have changed his mind and the 1931 version used *geʿez* for the short ‘a’ sound and *rabəʾə* for the long ‘a’ sound” (ARÉN 1978: 357 [also n. 227]).

<sup>42</sup> LUNDSTRÖM – EZRA GEBREMEDHIN 2011: 233.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*; ARÉN 1978: 357.

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As brother Rodén did not want to yield in anyway, the conference cannot take the responsibility for opposing his wishes. The conference wishes that he be allowed to follow his opinion, even if this is in conflict with the rules laid down by the Board [...], as the indigenous teachers have asked for a definite answer in order not to delay the printing of the NT unduly.<sup>44</sup>

Rodén's obstinacy regarding spelling and language forms was yet to face an ominous altercation later with another brilliant worker in Təgre languages, Gustaf Richard Sundström (1869–1919).

Anyways, following 12 years of labour an almost new translation of the Təgre New Testament was printed in August 1902 at the SEM Press in Asmāra.

It is not the heated debates and tendency to dominate on matters of style exhibited by the foreign workers that is the subject of this article; which could as well be valued as characteristic of excellence and taste for quality which is expected from people engaged in such a meticulous assignment as translation work. It is rather the characteric of these workers to monopolize credit for a work in which many indigenous workers have co-laboured with them for many years – at times the native workers dominating the task – that will be the focus of this article.

### Rodén and Sundström: Rivals Joining Hands in Taking Credit

The development of Təgre literature in the early decades faced a serious problem in the selection of style. The problem was mainly embodied in the altercation between Rodén and Sundström (as well as the native workers). Rodén's obdurate stand in boldly exchanging *rabəʾa*, the fourth vowel order, for *gəʾaz*, the first vowel order, which had started with the native workers during the revision of the 1890 New Testament, continued to clash with the equally stubborn Sundström, nine years younger than Rodén. The conflict between these two giants became so serious that in October 1903 a missionary conference was convened to settle the dispute. An excerpt from the report of the conference reads:

By nature both of them have difficulty in subordinating themselves to each other. Rodén appears to have too strong a tendency to wish to dominate. Sundström is closed in and tends to go his way, without giving enough consideration to his coworkers. And as both of them have

<sup>44</sup> LUNDSTRÖM – EZRA GEBREMEDHIN 2011: 229f.; however, "Professor Enno Littmann decided to use the fourth vowel of the Ethiopic alphabet whenever the vowel *a* came at the end of the word" and "[t]his was the conviction of Richard Sundström [...]"

independent characters, it is rather understandable that discord has arisen between them. We therefore feel that, in the future, they should be assigned to different places in order that their capabilities may be used to the full and their good qualities allowed to come to the fore [...]

Lundström and Ezra Gebremedhin continue:

Both were urged to confess their shortcomings and ask one another for forgiveness. They did so. For various reasons, the question of their placement could not be resolved until 1913, when the Sundströms moved from Geleb to Keren [...]

[...] At the annual conference [of the Mission Board in Sweden] held in November [1913] it was disclosed that the Board had decided that Rodén would be stationed in Geleb and Sundström in Keren. However, no love was lost between the two. Sundström was not prepared to print any material that followed Rodén's system of spelling and Rodén, for his part was opposed to having even some of Sundström's equipment stored in Geleb. *Literature work in Tigré seemed to have suffered from a complete breakdown*. However, at the annual conference in Addi Ugri on October 1–6, 1914, Rodén and Sundström reported that they had come to an agreement on the spelling of Təgré words. The disagreement between Rodén and Sundström had, however, a negative impact also on the Geleb congregation, with divisions among its members [emphasis added].<sup>45</sup>

The above being at the heart of the controversy between the two foreign workers, in the separate assignments in translation of the Bible into Təgre, however, they seem to show a similar character: they assumed the sole credit for the translation works that they could not have completed without the assistance of native Təgre translators.

### Rodén

The character of taking overstated credit could not be more glaring than in the case of the 1902 Təgre Bible, the translation of which was credited to Rodén who, as widely reported, was “assisted” by the indigenous scholars viz. Təwäldä Mädhən, Dawit and others.<sup>46</sup> This is quite surprising with the presence of enough records attesting to the fact that Dawit Amanuʾel almost singlehandedly prepared the draft translation, that Təwäldä Mädhən Gäbrä Mädhən played a significant role in the initial and final stages of preparing

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 233ff.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

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the draft translation and that a committee of four Təgre experts, Rodén included, worked for twelve years in a row:

[c]haracteristically enough, it was a missionary who was given the credit for the new translation, the Təgre New Testament of 1902 was *officially* attributed to Rodén. Whether this was fair or not may be gathered from Tewolde-Medhin's remark that the Ethiopian members of the revision committee questioned Rodén's 'discovery of the correct sentence structure' and his 'bold exchange of *rabe*, the fourth alphabet, for *ge'ez*, the first vowel' [emphasis added].<sup>47</sup>

The Italian title page of the 1902 Təgre Bible reads:

NUOVO TESTAMENTO IN TƏGRE  
radotto dal Greco basandosi specialmente  
sull'ultima versione Inglese ed anche Etiopica  
da  
Carlo Gustavo Rodén  
Coll' aiuto dei Maestri indigeni  
Twoldo Medhen, Davide Emanuele ed altri.<sup>48</sup>

Ullendorff, who would not get it completely right on the real authorship of the translation of the 1909 Təgrəñña New Testament, however, made the correct statement on the real authorship of the 1902 Təgre New Testament:

In 1902 the entire New Testament in Tigre was printed at the [SEM] Press in Asmara. It was the work of the same two indigenous scholars [Dawit Amanu'el and Təwäldä Mädhən Gäbrä Mädhən], now working under the guidance of K.G. Roden.<sup>49</sup>

### Sundström

Sundström produced, among other works,<sup>50</sup> translations of the Book of Psalms and Isaiah in Təgre which were separately printed in 1925 in Asmära

<sup>47</sup> ARÉN 1978: 357.

<sup>48</sup> Probably based on this title page, Voigt states: "the *entire* [Təgre New Testament] was *translated and edited by Karl Gustav Roden with the help of Təwäldä-Mädhən and Dawit Amanu'el*" [emphasis added]; VOIGT 2003: 577.

<sup>49</sup> ULLENDORFF 1968: 71.

<sup>50</sup> Dr. Sundström, the first and foremost doctor in the Mänsa'ə district, also composed nearly 200 hymns in Təgre, translated a number of books of the Old Testament into Təgre and prepared a collection of sermons and devotions. By the time he died on 16 June 1919 due to cancer, he had prepared a Təgre grammar and a translation of the Books of Isaiah, Genesis and Exodus into Təgre. He also collected 360, and Dawit



at the SEM Printing Press, six years after his death.<sup>51</sup> Two prominent native evangelical workers from the Kärän area in Eritrea, *qäšši* (E) Yoḥannəs Emiləyos Musa and *māmbər* °Uqbazgi Mändal, both from the Bilin ethnic group, assisted Sundström in his translation work. Sundström's Psalms were reprinted in 1931.<sup>52</sup> In the publication of Psalms and of Isaiah, once again, Sundström appears as the only person who worked on the translation.<sup>53</sup> In the words of Ullendorff:

In both [Psalms and Isaiah], the Revd. G.R. Sundström is stated to be the translator; the names of his indigenous assistants are not indicated.<sup>54</sup>

### On the *Təgrəñña* Bible

#### Six stages of Translation

The story of the translation of the Bible into *Təgrəñña* as conducted in Eritrea<sup>55</sup> may be divided into six stages.

The first stage, spanning between 1891 and 1900, saw the complete revision of the *Təgrəñña* Four Gospels, earlier translated by *däbtära* Matewos and published at the printing house in St. Chrischona in March 1866. The three

Amanu'el presumably another 195, of Professor Enno Littmann's 717 *Təgre* poems; ULLENDORFF 1968: 72 (and n. I). Arén adds:

“With due permission from the colonial government, though with little means, he undertook the first archaeological excavation of Adulis, the famous port and commercial center of the Aksumite kingdom, and made some important discoveries which aroused such great interest that the Italian authorities ordered their experts to take over. Sundström's medical and ethnographic knowledge came to the fore in some articles on popular medicine and the treatment of illnesses in Mensa. He also gathered a large collection of *Tigré* texts: poems, proverbs, riddles, legends and historical traditions”; ARÉN 1978: 358 (and n. 230 and 233); for more on Sundström see LINDAHL 2010: 767.

<sup>51</sup> MUSA °ARON 1988: 11; ARÉN 1978: 357–58.

<sup>52</sup> VOIGT 2003: 577.

<sup>53</sup> Voigt, for instance, states that “Parts of the [Old Testament] (Psalter and Isaiah) were translated by Gustav Richard Sundström and published at Asmära” (*ibid.*).

<sup>54</sup> ULLENDORFF 1968: 72.

<sup>55</sup> The phrase “as conducted in Eritrea” was added to distinguish the *Təgrəñña* Bible translation works earlier conducted elsewhere, especially in Ethiopia. These include: Nathaniel Pearce's translations of the Gospels of Mark and John during his stay in Ethiopia between 1805 and 1819; Rev. Christian Kügler's translation of the Gospel of Luke sometime after February 1830; Rev. Samuel Gobat's translation of the Gospel of John; and, the most famous of them all, *däbtära* Matewos' translation of the New Testament (1835–1837) supervised by Rev. Carl Wilhelm Isenberg, the Four Gospels of which were printed in March 1866.

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prominent workers involved in this project were *qäšši* (E) Marqos Gərmay of Kwazen (1862–1924), *qäšši* Gäbrä Ewostatewos – colloqually Gäbrä-tatyos – Zämika’el (ca. 1865–1905) of Wäki-Dəba and *däbtära* Rufa’el, a young famine refugee who had taken shelter at Əmkullu. Supervised by Karl Winqvist, the three produced a new translation of the Four Gospels which was printed in 1900 in Asmära at the printing press of the SEM.

The second stage, which began sometime before 1900 and ended in December 1909, witnessed the preparation of the first complete New Testament in Təgrəñña. Supervised and assisted by Winqvist, the workers who were involved in varying capacities in the preparation of the 1909 New Testament were *qäšši* (E) Marqos Gərmay, *qäšši* (O)<sup>56</sup> Gäbrä Ewostatewos Zämika’el, *qäšši* (E) Təwäldä Mädhən Gäbrä Mädhən of Šəmanəgus Tahtay and *haläqa* Təwäldä Mädhən Gäbru of May Məšam, a village near ‘Adwa, especially the two Təwäldä Mädhəns.

The third stage extends between some time before 1909 and approximately 1930. This period covers the preparation of a manuscript with the translation of the Old Testament into Təgrəñña. The key figures in this project were *qäšši* (E) Təwäldä Mädhən Gäbrä Mädhən, *haläqa* Təwäldä Mädhən Gäbru and *qäšši* (E) Mäzgäbä – Mäzgäbä Šəllase, to be appropriate – Wäldu (1878–1965) of Abarda’ə. *Qäšši* (E) Təwäldä Mädhən Gäbrä Mädhən was in charge of the assignment. They were later joined in editing the manuscripts by Mrs. Elsie Winqvist (1863–1957), Rev. Mikael Holmer (1869–1944) and *qäšši* (E) Əmbayä Habtä Əgzi’ (1903–2000) of Amadər.

The fourth stage extends between 1926 and 1933 during which the 1909 Təgrəñña New Testament was revised and a second edition was printed in 1933. The committee of reviewers assigned for this task comprised Mrs. Winqvist, who headed the work, Rev. Mikael Holmer, *qäšši* (E) Gərma Šəyon Gäbrä (1877–1953),<sup>57</sup> *qäšši* (E) Əmbayä Habtä-Əgzi’ and Bayru ‘Uqbit of Gärämi.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>56</sup> The identifier “(O)” has also been used to distinguish native workers who had already been ordained to priesthood at the Orthodox *Təwəhədo* Church before they joined the Eritrean Evangelical Church.

<sup>57</sup> He was first called into the literary works of the evangelical mission as a replacement for *qäšši* (O) Gäbrä Ewostatewos Zämika’el who had left to the Oromo of Wälläga in February 1897 to pioneer an evangelical mission. He was a man of remarkable language skills – he knew Təgrəñña, Gə‘əz, Təgre, Amharic, Arabic, Italian and Swedish.

<sup>58</sup> Father of *däggəzmač* Tädla Bayru, the first Chief Executive of Eritrea (1952–1955) during Eritrea’s federation with Ethiopia; Bayru ‘Uqbit was active in producing Təgrəñña literature, the most notable being his translation of Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* in 1926. Around the time his translation was published, Bayru was called to join the team that was revising the 1909 New Testament in Təgrəñña.

The fifth stage was the more than 25 year period for the revision of the Old and New Testaments. The three most notable workers who endured until the finalization of the editing process were Mrs. Winqvist, *qäšši* (E) ፤mbayä and Rev. Alessandro Tron (1887–1966). Others who were involved during various stages of the editing process were *haläqa* Täwäldä Mädhən Gäbru, who headed the work until he left to Təgray in April 1932, Rev. Mikael Holmer, *qäšši* (E) Gərma Şəyon, Bayru ʿUqbit and *haläqa* Gäbrä Krəstos. The first complete Təgrəñña Bible was distributed to the public in April 1957.

The final stage of the translation process extends between 1982 and 2000. The first phase of this (1982–1998) saw the revision of the 1957 Təgrəñña Bible under the auspices of the Bible Society of Ethiopia, continued by the Bible Society of Eritrea after Eritrea’s independence in 1991. Although *māmhər* ʿAmdä Bərhan Gäbrä Maryam from the Orthodox *Təwəhədo* Church and *abba* Täkləzgi ʿUqba Giyorgis from the Catholic Church endured until the end, other experts were also involved in this process viz. *Ḥaw* (Brother) Mikaʿel Gäbrä Maryam – replaced by *abba* Täkləzgi – and Təqʷabo Aräsəʿə (from the Evangelical Church).<sup>59</sup> The revised Təgrəñña Bible with the conventional 66 books appeared in 1998.

After completion of the review of the Old Testament, *māmhər* ʿAmdä Bərhan and *abba* Täkləzgi proceeded with the translation of 16 deuterocanonical books. During the translation of the deuterocanonical Book of Esther, the Greek Version, *abba* Täkləzgi was transferred to Ethiopia by his church, but he continued the work by correspondence with *māmhər* ʿAmdä Bərhan. In 2000, an improved version of the 1998 Bible, i.e., one which also contains 16 deuterocanonical books, was published by the Bible Society of Eritrea.

### The Winqvists and *qäšši* (E) Täwäldä Mädhən Gäbrä Mädhən on Taking Credit

Of interest to the subject of this article are the 1900 Four Gospels, 1909 New Testament, the 1933 New Testament and the 1957 whole Bible translations.

### The 1900 Four Gospels

Karl Winqvist’s role as the inspiration behind the translation work and his relentless working for the translators cannot be denied. However, whereas his job was limited to managing and supervising the translation works, he had from the get-go reserved the lion’s share of credit to himself. It began with the 1900 revision of the Four Gospels which was basically the work of the three native workers: *qäšši* (E) Marqos Gərmay, *qäšši* (O) Gäbrä Ewostətewos

<sup>59</sup> Amongst them, these four reviewers knew Təgrəñña, Gəʿəz, Amharic, English, Arabic, Hebrew, Greek and Italian.

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Zāmikaʾel and *dābtära* Rufaʾel, especially the first two. Nevertheless, the caption of the 1900 Four Gospels reads: “*The Four Gospels of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the Tigrinja language, translated by K. Winqvist, assisted by Markus Germei [i.e., Marqos Gərmay] and Gebra Istaius [i.e., Gäbrä Ewostatewos Zāmikaʾel]*”.

### The 1909 New Testament

Winqvist’s claiming of credit for the literary works that he supervised continued with the 1909 Təgrāñña New Testament. Some authors even claim that he authored the 1909 New Testament in Təgrāñña.<sup>60</sup> The accounts on the real authorship of the 1909 Təgrāñña New Testament are conflicting and it is about time that we put this to rest. Idris, for instance, claims that the 1909 Təgrāñña New Testament was published by the Winqvists.<sup>61</sup> Iwarson and Tron as well as Voigt give the authorship to Karl Winqvist and Tāwäldä Mādḥən Gäbrä Mādḥən.<sup>62</sup> Ullendorff has held that the 1909 version was prepared by the co-operation of Winqvist and *haläqa* Tāwäldä Mādḥən Gäbru without mentioning the third pillar of the 1909 version, *qäšši* (E) Tāwäldä Mādḥən Gäbrä Mādḥən.<sup>63</sup> Quite surprisingly, in his 29 December 1909 letter to Sweden, *qäšši* (E) Tāwäldä Mādḥən claims that the 1909 translation was completed by him and Winqvist.<sup>64</sup>

The truth is that Winqvist did not sit with the indigenous workers and translated books into Təgrāñña because of his limited knowledge of the language. Apparently contradicting records exist regarding Winqvist’s mastery of Təgrāñña. For instance, while Lundström and Ezra Gebremedhin have stated that Winqvist was not fluent in Amharic and Təgrāñña,<sup>65</sup> Enno Littmann has called Winqvist “one of the foremost Tigrinya scholars”.<sup>66</sup>

The origin for claims on Karl Winqvist being the translator or one of the translators of the 1909 Təgrāñña New Testament is none other than the doctor himself. *Qäšši* (E) Tāwäldä Mādḥən, who a few weeks after the

<sup>60</sup> GHIRMAI NEGASH 1999: 69.

<sup>61</sup> HELEN FATIMA IDRIS 2003: 59; see also the most mistaken historical account of the translation process: a brief note on a 30 minute color film produced by the British and Foreign Bible Society on the occasion of the distribution of the Təgrāñña Bible: “The work of translation began in 1883 when Dr Karl Winqvist and his wife went to Africa as missionaries. The language had never been written, so the translator had to formulate a grammar before his work could begin. After his death, his wife carried on the work” (YOUDELL 1959: 29).

<sup>62</sup> IWARSON –TRON 1918: 37; VOIGT 2003: 577.

<sup>63</sup> ULLENDORFF 1968: 49, 71.

<sup>64</sup> HOLMER 1938: 136.

<sup>65</sup> LUNDSTRÖM – EZRA GEBREMEDHIN 2011: 283.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276, n. 484.

printing of the 1909 New Testament would not name *haläqa* Täwäldä Mädhən as a translator, was obviously involved in the debate on taking credit for the work. On this Arén writes:

Tewolde-Medhin G.M. criticized Winqvist for seeking the credit for the New Testament in Tigrinya, writing: ‘The truth is: Dr Winqvist... has not written a single line of it ... though it must be admitted that he takes interest in the work and constantly supervises it’.<sup>67</sup>

Probably aware of a potential criticism against any claim by him for the actual translation work, Karl Winqvist was carefully not claiming the task in the 1909 print of the New Testament. In his three-page preface to the 1909 Təgrəñña New Testament, he does not expressly mention that he translated New Testament books into Təgrəñña, although it can be observed from his preface that he was very active in leading the translation group and in reviewing the successive drafts by comparing them with versions of the New Testament in other languages.

Karl Winqvist’s character of taking full credit for a job predominantly done by others – natives in this case – did not begin with the 1909 Təgrəñña New Testament. When the *Sillabario nella lingua Tigrinja* appeared in 1896, the doctor did not mention *däbtära* Rufa’el, the real author of the publication, by name.<sup>68</sup> In the title page, we read *Tradotto da Dre C. Winqvist insieme con maestri indigeni*, translated as *Translated by Dr. C. Winqvist together with indigenous scholars*. Here, Winqvist describes himself as a translator. However, the book is not a translation from any other language, except maybe the two books of the Bible contained therein, and it is not clear what portions Winqvist himself translated). Even if it were a translation work, Winqvist did not show the uprightness to name his indigenous colleagues.

<sup>67</sup> ARÉN 1978: 337, n. 129.

<sup>68</sup> While the preparation of the 1900 Four Gospels in Təgrəñña was in full swing, Winqvist, noticing Rufa’el’s unique literary talent, had set the young refugee to write down all proverbs, riddles, stories and legends that he knew or gathered from other refugees. Before long Rufa’el prepared a complete list of Təgrəñña alphabets and then compiled a list of more than a thousand proverbs. The result of his amazing work was the *Sillabrio nella lingua Tigrinja*, a book published in 1896 in Asmära which contained a long list of alphabetically arranged common Təgrəñña words, 55 fables, 75 riddles, 471 proverbs and almost a full translation of the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Rufa’el’s works encouraged Karl Winqvist to “persuade his colleagues [at Əmkullu] to pass a resolution in 1893 [despite strong opposition from some of them] that Tigrinya [Təgrəñña] should replace Amarinya [Amharic] in church and school as soon as sufficient books could be produced” (*ibid.*, p. 333).

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### Karl Winqvist's Fluency in Təgrəñña Scrutinized

Existing documents on Winqvist do not claim that he was *fluent* in any of the languages in the literary production of which he laboured. Arén tells us that it was only in 1894, when the impairment of his sight compelled him to reduce his surgical work that Winqvist started to study Təgrəñña.<sup>69</sup> The *Sillabario nella lingua Tigrinja* appeared in 1896 and Winqvist continued to study Təgrəñña in 1897 after he relocated to the highland village of Bäläza.<sup>70</sup> How is it then that the doctor could claim to be the author of a book written in a language he was still studying? Lundström and Ezra Gebremedhin also tell us that, although he was good at the technique of translation and “equipped with a thorough knowledge of Greek and Hebrew,” he “had first learned Amharic and then Tigrinya but was not fluent in either language”.<sup>71</sup>

### Elsie Winqvist Keeps it Right

When it comes to the subject of taking credit for the translation work, Mrs. Winqvist is different from her SEM colleagues. Compared to her husband Karl Winqvist, Elsie goes two steps ahead. Firstly, her proficiency in Təgrəñña is well documented and her name should appear at the forefront of the stalwarts of the preparation of the Təgrəñña Bible, especially during the period after 1930. Secondly, she left notes in which she narrates the contributions of her ‘translation cum revision’-colleagues.

Elsie was the head of the revision project that started in 1930. Until the moment of her expulsion by the Italians on 15 December 1935, Elsie continued to work with her colleagues. Lundström and Ezra Gebremedhin quote her notes on how she ran the revision process:

We decided to invite our pastors, elders and teachers to a conference which would last for two days and where these proposals would be discussed. There were some discussions as to the right way of spelling words. There are some sounds for which we do not have a sign and others that have several. We agreed to follow the traditional Ethiopian spelling, using two points after each word, even if this is both

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 335.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 335f.

<sup>71</sup> LUNDSTRÖM – EZRA GEBREMEDHIN 2011: 283; Lundström and Ezra Gebremedhin add that in 1907 Nyström “gave out a new hymnal that contained a large number of hymns translated mainly from Swedish, and which was very well received. Even in the hymnal of 1961 (Mezmur Selam) no less than 92 hymns out of 306 bore his name” (*ibid.*, p. 283, n. 498).

troublesome and expensive.<sup>72</sup> A consistent pattern of spelling would certainly be much better, but we will have to hasten slowly.

Lundström and Ezra Gebremedhin continue the narration of the process:

In November 1931, Bairu Uqbit became Winqvist's assistant. His knowledge of Italian, Amharic and Ge'ez was of great help. The team would sit together at the same table under the direction of *Haleqa* Tewolde-Medhin,<sup>73</sup> while Winqvist listened to their discussions. In April 1932, when *Haleqa* had to leave Eritrea and return to Tigrai, Bairu was already initiated into the procedures of their work. The team would sit together working on a section. They would then call upon *Keshi* Girma-Tsion to assist them with the final wording.<sup>74</sup>

Elsie noted:

At times we called Pastor Holmer<sup>75</sup> to assist us, for which task he might take off a couple of days. Our youngest co-worker, the teacher Embaye [thirty years old by the time Elsie wrote this note in 1933], was in charge of checking the manuscripts, particularly with regard to orthography, punctuation and preliminary proofreading. He became a valued co-worker.<sup>76</sup>

Her account of what transpired during the revision processes that led to the production of the 1933 New Testament and 1957 entire Bible depicts exactitude and gives proper credit to her colleagues. The handwritten revisions of Elsie and her colleagues, especially Āmbayä, as well as the Old Testament translations by *qäšši* (E) Tāwäldä Mädhən et al., are still neatly kept at the

<sup>72</sup> Lundström and Ezra Gebremedhin have noted: "When the complete Bible was published in 1957 Winqvist's proposals were implemented" (*ibid.*, p. 416, n. 785). I agree to the extent that the 1957 Təgrəñña Bible does not have special signs for some sounds which do not have a sign (although I am unaware of any such sound in the Təgrəñña vocabulary, written or spoken). Similarly, I am unaware of Təgrəñña sounds which have several signs. What could Elsie Winqvist have meant? As to the use of two points after each word, however, it cannot be said that this proposal was implemented in the 1957 Təgrəñña Bible because the 1957 Bible does not contain two points after each word.

<sup>73</sup> A proof that *haläqa* Tāwäldä Mädhən Gäbru was active in the editing work until April 1932.

<sup>74</sup> A proof that *qäšši* (E) Gərma Şəyon Gäbrä was active in the editing work at the beginning of the 25 years long editing process.

<sup>75</sup> This is a proof that Rev. Mikael Holmer was active in the editing process at the beginning of the 25 year long editing work. Could his 'Old Testament translation cum revision'-colleague at Şä'azzäga, *qäšši* (E) Mäzgäbä Wäldu, also have been initially involved in the editing process?

<sup>76</sup> LUNDSTRÖM – EZRA GEBREMEDHIN 2011: 415–418.



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archives of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Eritrea.<sup>77</sup> Elsie's care in not monopolizing the credit for the work needs to be noted given the general tendency of the foreign workers to take sole credit for the translation works.

### Kunama scriptural works

In addition to the scriptural productions in Təgrəñña, Təgre, Amharic and Oromo, the SEM was also active in preparing scriptural and literary works in other languages such as Kunama and Kiswahili. The first attempt to put the Kunama language into writing was by Carl Johan Carlsson (1836–1867), one of the first three SEM missionaries who had pioneered the evangelical works of the SEM in Eritrea by working in the Kunama land since June 1866 and was undoubtedly the most influential of the three.<sup>78</sup> It is written of Carlsson that he prepared “a draft for a Kunama grammar and dictionary, but he died and it was not published.”<sup>79</sup> Following Carlsson's attempt came the publication in 1873 of *Litet prof på Kunama-språket* (*Some Examples from the Kunama Language*) by the SEM missionary Petrus Englund (1836–1916) who, together with three other colleagues,<sup>80</sup> arrived at the Kunama land in May 1867 to assist the earlier three missionaries.<sup>81</sup>

The missionaries of Kunama could not continue their literary or scriptural work due to the heartrending withdrawal into Massawa in February 1870 following a series of deaths and murders. After decades of suspending their work therein, the SEM workers returned to the Kunama land, “their early love”, as Arén puts it, and resumed their work in December 1897 through Rev. Johan Magnus Nilsson (1865–1949) who was joined in 1898 by Rev. August Andersson (1868–1952), an energetic missionary who worked for 17 years among the Kunama people.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>77</sup> I saw them in 2007 – for anyone to see who did what.

<sup>78</sup> Colloquially called “the first three” in evangelical circles in Eritrea, the three pioneer missionaries who, although originally sent to spread the evangelical seed among the Oromo people of Ethiopia, were convinced to work among the Kunama people of Eritrea, are Carl Johan Carlsson (1836–1867), Per Erik Kjellberg (1837–1869) and Lars Johan Lange (1837–1911); *ibid.*, pp. 130–138; ARÉN 1978: 130, 140.

<sup>79</sup> HELEN FATIMA IDRIS 2003: 54.

<sup>80</sup> Olof Hedin (1839–1868), Johan Leonard Elfbald (1839–1869) and the illustrious evangelist and martyr for the gospel Per Erik Lager (1837–1872); see LUNDSTRÖM – EZRA GEBREMEDHIN 2011: 135–138; ARÉN 1978: 135. Arén omits Elfbald as a member of the May 1867 reinforcement team, but mentions him as “a recent arrival” when narrating the tragic Tika incident of April 1869; *ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>81</sup> LUNDSTRÖM – EZRA GEBREMEDHIN 2011: 139, n. 215; Idris states that Carlsson's earlier unpublished work could have been included in Englund's 1873 publication; see HELEN FATIMA IDRIS 2003: 54.

<sup>82</sup> ARÉN 1978: 146ff., 364f.; LUNDSTRÖM – EZRA GEBREMEDHIN 2011: 240–244, 255.

Magnus Nilsson and August Andersson produced the following in Kunama: a spelling book and a small hymn book both of which were published in 1903; the Gospel of Mark translated by August Andersson and published in 1906; *Bible Stories* prepared by August Andersson; a second edition of the hymn book with a collection of 270 hymns prepared by August Andersson translated mainly from Swedish and published in 1914. The Gospels of Mathew, Luke and John as well as Acts, existing in manuscript without being printed. All these books “were important, regardless of several errors as to idiom and grammar”.<sup>83</sup>

What follows next is not fully a narration of ‘taking sole credit’ by foreign workers in translation of the Bible in Eritrea *per se*, but the related character of undermining the importance of involving native speakers of above-average academic and literary capacities in the translation work. Heavy involvement of native speakers can at least help a foreign worker to choose the appropriate dialect for translation lest the translation has small readership. This is what happened in the Kunama translation of the New Testament by the messengers of the SEM.

Nilsson and Andersson had started the translation of the New Testament into Kunama from around 1905. However, probably due to lack of qualified indigenous translators or other reasons, the work lingered for nearly two decades. Finally, after the arrival in 1922 of Rev. Olle Hagner (1895–1978), formerly Olof Andersson,<sup>84</sup> and with the assistance of indigenous Kunama converts, especially Dan’el Luli, the Kunama New Testament was accelerated and its first publication appeared in 1923.<sup>85</sup> Lundström and Ezra Gebremedhin narrate the story and highlight the somewhat condescending treatment of the indigenous worker Dan’el Luli by Nilsson, probably due to the former’s ‘backsliding’ tendency:

Daniel Luli, who had been described as ‘restless spirit’ by Peter,<sup>86</sup> was of help to Magnus Nilsson in his work in the translation of the New Testament. The task had been started some twenty years earlier

<sup>83</sup> ARÉN 1978: 367; LUNDSTRÖM – EZRA GEBREMEDHIN 2011: 264.

<sup>84</sup> ARÉN 1978: 369, n. 282.

<sup>85</sup> LUNDSTRÖM – EZRA GEBREMEDHIN 2011: 264; IWARSON – TRON 1918: 39; ĔMBAYĀ HABTĀ-ĔGZİ’Ĕ 1966: 14. Ĕmbayā also mentions that a *Catechism* was produced by these workers, although he fails to mention when it was printed. Note, however, that the year of publication of the Kunama New Testament is different according to Ĕmbayā and Lundström – Ezra Gebremedhin – 1923 and 1927 respectively.

<sup>86</sup> Peter (Petter) Andersson (1868–1947), the first Swede ordained in Eritrea in 1921, was a missionary who laboured among the Kunama of Eritrea from 1903 until 1929. Called “a meticulous missionary” and “Systematic Recorder”, Peter is an amazing personality to read; see LUNDSTRÖM – EZRA GEBREMEDHIN 2011: 247–250, 471.

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[around 1905] by August Andersson and J. M. Nilsson, as it was high time [in early 1920s] that it be completed. However, Magnus was not very willing to take advice from [Dan'el,] a Kunama. *Instead he kept telling Daniel: 'You don't understand this!'* Peter was evidently upset by these comments. Following the return of the Nilssons to Sweden in 1925 August Andersson and Magnus Nilsson completed the translation of the New Testament. [emphasis added]<sup>87</sup>

As to the process that led to the production of the New Testament in Kunama, Lundström and Ezra Gebremedhin add:

[...] the translation of the New Testament took much longer. One reason must have been lack of qualified local staff. The work was completed and published only in 1927, when qualified Kunama Christians joined the translation team [...] August Andersson was a man of action. He tended to dictate. This attitude had some negative consequences, not least in literary work. Sections of what he had written were difficult for the Kunama to understand. Furthermore, variations in the different dialects made the choice of standard expressions difficult.<sup>88</sup>

The scriptural and related works produced in Kunama by the Swedish missionaries have been criticised in their choice of the mix of Kunama dialects. The following paragraphs will try to explain why.

Kunama is one of the four Chari-Nile languages within the Nilo-Saharan super-family of African languages.<sup>89</sup> It is spoken in western Eritrea on the Gaš and Täkkäze rivers with extensions westwards into the Sudan and southwards into the Təgray province of Ethiopia.<sup>90</sup>

Bender holds that there are four main dialects in the Kunama language: Marda – “the most prestigious” according to Bender –, Barka, Aymasa and Tika “and several minor varieties”. He then discusses the status of these several minor varieties. Ilit and Sokodas he states, share, according to another author (Daniel Tesfamariam) less than 70 % of the basic lexicon with the other dialects and thus may be “classified as closely related languages”. As to Bitama, Bender maintains that its position is not clear because most of its speakers seem to have completely shifted to Təgre.<sup>91</sup> John Abraha lists Aymasa, Barka, Bitama, Ilit, Marda, Sokodasa, Taguda and Tika as the dialects

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 252.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 265f.

<sup>89</sup> LUNDSTRÖM – EZRA GEBREMEDHIN 2011: 57; BENDER 2007: 451b; JOHN ABRAHA 2005: 29.

<sup>90</sup> BENDER 2007: 451b.

<sup>91</sup> JOHN ABRAHA 2005: 29.

of the Kunama language. He acknowledges the widely accepted truth that “Barka and Marda are the main dialects used by a vast number of Kunama population and used also for writing school texts and for evangelization”.

As to the selection of an appropriate and working dialect, Abraha notes: “[...] Kunama has an appreciable dialect differentiation, but not much work has been done so far to assess the degree of mutual intelligibility among the dialects” and continues to present and analyse a survey conducted in 1997 by the Department of General Education of Eritrea, especially by the Coordinator of Kunama Panel. The survey was aimed, *inter alia*, at recommending which main dialect(s) should become the standard(s) for formal communication.<sup>92</sup> The relationships and differences among the various dialects were studied based on comparison of the translations of 320 English words into the different Kunama dialects; Recorded Text Testing was conducted; a story consisting of 100 words written in the Marda dialect was translated into the other dialects; and qualitative data were collected based on interviews.<sup>93</sup>

Abraha concludes that the choice of the appropriate text should at least be a mix of Barka and Marda as tested in the other dialects. To quote from his conclusions and recommendations:

Barka and Marda [...] not only have the highest number of speakers but have also been written since the 1920s. *The Swedish Evangelical Mission, which did most of its work of evangelization among the Marda group, has produced many religious books in this dialect. Likewise, the Roman Catholic Mission produced its materials in Barka dialect.* These dialects have also been used for writing elementary school books and for broadcasts in the Kunama radio station for more than a decade.

If any one dialect (either Barka or Marda) is selected as a standard for official communication, its selection will most probably create no difficulties for the dialects of Aymasa, Tika, and Taguda, but it will create serious problems for Ilit and Sokodasa [...] <sup>94</sup> [emphasis added].

Back to the productions of the SEM in Kunama language; we have stated earlier that these Kunama works were important, regardless of several errors as to idiom and grammar. Furthermore the tendency to dominate of at least one of the workers, August Andersson, led into production of works that were difficult for the Kunama to understand and was further complicated by the variations in different dialects which made the choice of standard expressions difficult. The main cause for this was the insistence by the SEM workers

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 31–35.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

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to use only the Marda dialect; this choice could also have been attributed to either their lack of knowledge on the various Kunama dialects or their criticisable decision of excluding native Kunama speakers of varying dialects. Lundström and Ezra Gebremedhin succinctly summarize it as follows:

[August Andersson and Magnus Nilsson] [s]urely assisted and encouraged by many a Kunama [...] worked with the language, with questions of health, building and agriculture. The two completed the translation of the New Testament into Marda Kunama, even though the quality of their translation has been subjected to criticism.<sup>95</sup>

### Conclusion

The issue of foreigners coming to Developing Countries (poor countries or communities in Africa or elsewhere) and taking full credit for whatever good comes out of these communities has reflected itself in all the transactions – spanning from colonialism to evangelistic mission – which linked the foreigners with those indigenous communities. Such a tendency seems to have originated from the general belief, true sometimes, that at least in the last two or three centuries civilization and development as well as literary enlightenment was brought by the foreigners to the so-called less civilized communities.

Attribution of the credit of the translation of the Bible into the four Eritreo-Ethiopian languages to SEM missionaries seems naturally to make sense given the high level of academic and scriptural level that the SEM missionaries possessed when they met the poor, uneducated natives in Eritrea. A detailed study of the speed with which the native workers adopted the world of the foreign workers and elevated themselves into scriptural works, however, puts the tendency of the foreign workers and a number of scholars of the subject to crown the foreign workers with the Bible translation achievements under scrutiny.

The least that can be done, therefore, is to accurately demarcate the border between the labour of the foreign missionaries and that of their native colleagues by examining the translations themselves and available records on the translation works. It is not to be denied that these references are cloudy at the least and contradictory at the most, but this does not mean there is no use to studying who should take credit for the translation works and to what extent. It has been shown in this article that in some cases the foreign workers took credit for translations they did not predominantly, or even never, carry out, a fact that drives one to question their sincerity and the motive with which they approached the task.

<sup>95</sup> LUNDSTRÖM – EZRA GEBREMEDHIN 2011: 255.

The author has tried to identify the issue of taking credits as a recurring pattern in the Bible translation and some related works carried out in Eritrea by different foreign missionaries and native workers. The issue has not yet been thoroughly addressed in the myriad of publications on the achievements of the SEM in Eritrea and Ethiopia. This article is intended to give a more appropriate shape to a part of the not-yet-complete sculpture of a century long history made in a tiny corner at the Horn of Africa.

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### Summary

The labour and sacrifices of the members of the Swedish Evangelical Mission and their predecessors in the production of scriptural works in Eritrea, and partly in Ethiopia, are praiseworthy. More acclaim is owed to these workers for their educating and/or involving native workers in the arduous task that often spanned two or three generations. When it comes to taking credit for these works, however, the native workers were rarely mentioned or, if they are mentioned, their contributions were not given the deserved recognition. This article attempts to highlight the remarkable contributions of native workers in the translation, or completion of the translation, of the Bible into four languages in Eritrea in contradistinction with the often exaggerated contributions of foreign missionaries in that successful mission.